

# Rural Tourism Marketing

## Chapter ten – hooray for hollywood

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Hollywood is a temptress. She has lured thousands of young actors and actresses, producers and writers, technicians and tradesmen for more than a century. And today, she is attracting the attention of rural communities and big cities alike, as the economic benefits of film production have been quantified.

Fortunately, the attraction is mutual. The advantages of shooting here in the Golden State are obvious. With lush forests, beautiful beaches, quaint downtowns and barren



deserts, nearly every conceivable location shot can be filmed right here. Los Angeles County is the host of much of the production for the state. Of course, there are smaller production centers around California including San Francisco, San

Diego and Sacramento.

Film production has a number of attractions to rural communities. Film crews may fill up local hotels during otherwise slow periods. They rent location sites, buy supplies locally when possible, hire willing local residents as extras, and generally bring an aura of excitement to a community. Most importantly, they bring unexpected economic benefits to the area.

Unfortunately, they may also bring significant disruption to the small town atmosphere and routine. They have been known to film where they said they wouldn't, build something where they are not supposed to, make noises you weren't expecting (can you say "explosion?") and generally make the life of the local film liaison less than tranquil. But all things considered, the film production community wants to be a good neighbor and the experience will likely be a good one for all.

The key is to be prepared. Know what is expected of all parties involved, plan ahead for contingencies in case something goes wrong, and communicate constantly with those both directly and indirectly involved. If all this sounds like fun, read on!

## What is a film commission?

Film commissions are marketing organizations that promote their localities to the film and television industries. They do that by publicizing filming locations, services available to film companies (either through the commission or from other organizations or vendors) and crew availability. Additionally, many are permitting agents for a jurisdiction and act as advocates for filming. There are hundreds of officially sanctioned film commissions worldwide. Every state and most major cities have one, as do many regions, counties and towns.

Once a locality has been chosen for filming, staff members assist the production company and function as a liaison between the filmmakers and the community, helping to provide essential services such as parking, police assistance and traffic control.

A film office operates much the same as other marketing organizations, particularly those in the tourism industry. Staff members attend trade shows, make marketing calls on prospective clients, conduct Fam Tours and place news stories and advertising in national publications.

In fact, since both groups are working to promote the remarkable physical and human resources to be found within their jurisdictions, it is not surprising that tourism and film have been found to work so well together. In addition, studies have shown that states with strong film industries (like California) usually have strong tourism industries, particularly because a successful film can act as a powerful advertisement for the area in which it was shot.

In general, the primary services of a state or local film commission might include the following:

- **Location Scouting** – This involves doing the initial legwork for specific location needs. Usually, the film liaison will supply photography of suggested sites, coordinate initial scouting trips for the film company, and accompany the film scouts on initial visits, if desired.
- **Photo Library** – One of the primary functions of a film office is to maintain an extensive color photo library of locations throughout the region (usually available online). The staff should also be able to quickly assemble a photo package in response to a production company's specific request.
- **Pre-Production Research** – This involves helping find production services, accommodations, production personnel, talent, information on local laws and regulations, weather and climate data and appropriate introductions to local labor representatives, etc.

- **Government and Community Liaison** – Coordinate and facilitate introductions and help solicit cooperation with local, state and federal officials needed to fulfill the production company's requests. This liaison service should also extend to the local business community, civic and institutional leaders and neighborhood associations and residents.
- **Service throughout the production** – Members of a local film office or commission are generally "on-call" at all times during a production to address special needs, changes or requirements that occur.

A film commission can either be an independent body, a part of a tourism promotion organization or a division of a local or state government.

"flics" and the California film commission

Operating under the auspices of the California Technology, Trade and Commerce Agency, the California Film Commission (CFC) ([www.film.ca.gov](http://www.film.ca.gov)) teams with 57 in-state local film commissions to "retain, attract and facilitate film production" within California.

A "one-stop shop" for filmmakers, the CFC administers several incentive programs for filming in California as well as issues permits for filming on state property.

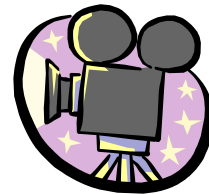
A new program called Film California First

### Iowa hit the jackpot!

Up until a few years ago, Madison County, Iowa's only claim to fame was as the birthplace of John Wayne.

Do you think anybody cares now?

It's hard to believe it was only a few years ago, 1995 to be exact, when location filming entered a new era of economic reward and long term tourism benefits with the production of the movie "The Bridges of Madison County."



Shot entirely on location, and using the historic covered bridges as a subject for National Geographic photographer Robert Kincaid (Clint Eastwood), the film brought international acclaim to the rural community. Co-starring Meryl Streep as a lonely farm wife who falls for the photographer while her family is out of town, the film served as a romantic travelogue featuring historic covered bridges and quaint country scenes.

Although the subject of an earlier best-selling novel of the same name, it wasn't until the film came out that the bridges began to lure visitors from across the country and around the world.

Tour operators added the destination to itineraries, additional motels were built, shops overflowed with movie related souvenirs and life was never the same.



Today, although the excitement has naturally tapered off a bit, Madison County still proudly bills itself as the location of the famous movie.

And as for John Wayne's birthplace...it gets a little recognition as well.

will reimburse certain costs incurred by qualified production companies filming within the state. For the first time, filmmakers will have the option of utilizing local, state and federal employees at no cost, and also be reimbursed for certain film permits and property use fees depending on the public properties selected. (Local police costs are excluded.) A qualified production company can save up to \$300,000 per production. For more information, visit [www.filmcafirst.com](http://www.filmcafirst.com).

Other services offered by the California Film Commission include production planning and troubleshooting, location assistance, permit assistance, emergency film production problem solving and development assistance for local organizations wishing to develop their own film programs and ordinances.

Another program of the CFC is called FLICS, or Film Liaisons in California, Statewide. This is a network of in-state film offices and commissions that work cooperatively with the California Film Commission to retain, attract and facilitate film production within designated jurisdictions. The communications links between the CFC and these local offices help facilitate filming across the state.

A full listing of FLICS is available on the CFC web site ([www.film.ca.gov](http://www.film.ca.gov)), or by calling the California Film Commission at (323) 860-2960.

The California Film Commission offers some excellent publications if you are serious about getting some of this lucrative film production money into your community. Attracting Film Production is a “how-to guide” for communities interested in promoting their locales to film companies. Also available are publications for individual property owners eager to host film production, a Community Good Neighbor Code of Conduct for property owners who don’t wish to make enemies of those living next door, and a Filmmakers’ Code of Professional Conduct for location filming (see the “Helpful Hint” below).

Finally, and perhaps needless to say, the Internet can be a powerful tool for the local film commission in providing access to their area at Hollywood’s fingertips. Any film commission without a website is missing out on perhaps its most powerful marketing weapon.

***Helpful Hint:*** Every rural chamber of commerce manager, visitors bureau director or local official thinking about the film industry should watch the movie “State and Main,” starring Alec Baldwin in a hilarious exaggeration of what can go wrong when big city filming meets small town America!

